



Annapolis Fire Department

Operating Policy Manual


Chapter 2: Administration

2.10 Public Information

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Approved
by:


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Fire Chief

2.10.1

News Media Relations

It is the Department's goal to develop a maximum flow of information to the public through the media with a minimum amount of disruption to fire department operations. The policy of this department is to cooperate impartially, with all news media, while complying with the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act), unless such cooperation would hamper an arson and/or fire investigation or infringe upon the rights of an individual to privacy.

2.10.2

Emergency Scene

Providing and maintaining effective fire department operations and the necessity of preserving the integrity of the emergency incident scene takes priority over news media coverage. Access to the emergency incident area will be permitted only after being cleared with the Incident Commander to ensure the safety of any media person on the scene.

2.10.3

Information Releases

Information on routine emergency incidents (fire alarms less than two alarms or fires and/or incidents that are not being investigated by the Fire and Explosive Services Unit (FESU)) may be released to the media by the Incident Commander. Information that is supplied by an informant should be clearly indicated; and furthermore only information that can be substantiated or verified may be released.

The Officer-In-Charge of a Division, Section, etc., may release information on routine and established operational policy pertaining to their respective areas of responsibility.

A. The following is a list of information that may be released:

1. The nature of the incident, e. g., house fire, boat fire, automobile fire, brush fire, etc.
2. The location, date and time of the incident.
3. Cause and origin of the incident (for known accidental fires only).
4. The name of the Officer-In-Charge of the incident and the officer's assignment, e. g., Captain John Doe, Duty Officer.
5. General Information such as the number and types of apparatus used, number of firefighters that fought the fire, number of alarms, time alarm was received, time the fire was under control, etc.

B. Information that may not be released.

1. The identity of any person injured or deceased prior to the notification of next of kin.
2. Cause and origin of an arson fire or any fire that is being investigated by the FESU. This information will be released through the FESU.

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3. Any matter involving a policy decision of the City or Fire Department, or policy interpretation without direct approval of the Chief or respective Deputy Chief of the Department.
 4. Medical or physiological information, other than to the person that is the subject of the record.
- C. Release of information shall be governed by the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) for Municipal Officials, the Federal Public Information Act, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPPA). MPIA requests shall be forwarded to the Office of Law for review and dissemination.

2.10.4

Public Information Officer

- A. The Annapolis Fire Department will designate a Public Information Officer to promote cooperation and mutual respect between the news media. The Public Information Officer, a member of the staff of the Fire Chief, shall provide public information to authorized representatives of the news media to assist in their function. The Public Information Officer will coordinate activities with other Public Safety Information Officers covering an incident.
- B. The Public Information Officer shall be notified automatically of any Second Alarm incident or greater and/or any other incident requested by the Incident Commander.

2.10.4.1

Responsibilities and Duties

The Public Information Officer is responsible for:

- A. Disseminating information to the news media.
- B. Discussing departmental policy; with the direct approval of the Chief or Deputy Chief, after detailed consultation has been completed.
- C. Planning, developing, writing and distributing positive image-building, explanatory and other informational releases and/or articles about the programs and activities of the Department and its personnel rests with the Public Information Officer. To assist in this goal :
 1. The Officer-In-Charge of all Platoons, Divisions, Bureaus, and Sections shall inform the Public Information Officer on major changes in operations, procedures and personnel.
 2. Newsworthy information on departmental programs and/or activities shall be forwarded to the Public Information Officer in writing.
 3. Personnel shall allow the Public Information Officer sufficient lead time so that the information can be disseminated to the media.
- D. Serving as the primary contact for any department personnel or media representatives who have questions in regards to the release of information.

2.10.5

Official Department Photographer

Photographs may be taken for the purposes of documenting emergency incidents, training and other operations of the Annapolis Fire Department. Individuals taking pictures must not interfere with emergency operations. These guidelines are intended to establish procedures for the Official Department Photographer (hereinafter referred to as "photographer") and are for the photographer's safety, the safety of other personnel, and for the orderly execution of the photographer's duties.

2.10.5.1

Administrative Guidelines

- A. The photographer must be a member of the Annapolis Fire Department or a member of a volunteer fire company and must be covered by injured workers' insurance.

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- B. The photographer shall work under the direction of the Incident Commander, a Fire Marshal Investigator or the Public Information Officer.
 - C. The photographer's immediate supervisor shall be the department's Public Information Officer.
 - D. All photograph negatives, videos and other visual media, hereinafter referred to as "material," are the property of and are for the use of the Annapolis Fire Department.
 - E. Information and material are to be given only to the FESU. In the case of information or material obtained at an incident scene outside the City, the photographer must have approval from both that jurisdiction and an investigator from the Annapolis FESU before releasing information or material.
 - F. Information and material obtained as a civilian and not within privileged areas, when neither the photographer nor a vehicle has been identified with the Annapolis Fire Department, does not fall under the purview of this department.

2.10.5.2

On-scene Guidelines for Fire Department Photographer

- A. The photographer shall wear required personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate for the incident scene:
 - 1. Red PPE coat red letters reading, "ANNAPOLIS FIRE DEPT. PHOTOGRAPHER"
 - 2. Yellow PPE pant
 - 3. Yellow PPE helmet with crescent reading "PHOTOGRAPHER"
- B. The photographer shall carry two Annapolis Fire Department identification tags.
- C. When reporting to incidents, the photographer shall report to the Command Post (CP)/Incident Commander and provide one identification tag to the CP.
- D. The photographer's vehicle must be properly designated.
- E. The photographer's vehicle shall not be parked in a position that impedes the actions of emergency responders.
- F. The photographer shall respect at all times any safety zones established by the Incident Commander.
- G. The photographer shall be courteous to civilians who ask why photographs are being taken.

2.10.5.3

On-Scene Guidelines for Fire Department Personnel

- A. The collection of media (photographic/video graphic/audio recordings) may be used for training or other activities within the fire department. The attainment of photographic, video graphic and audio recordings/information is required for some positions within the department, as noted above. This information is used for media/community relations, training, investigations, litigation, and the marketing of the organization.
 - 1. Collection of all information for an emergency incident shall be conducted by the Incident Commander, Public Information Officer, Assistant Public Information Officer(s) and members of the Fire Marshal's Office.
 - 2. The collection of photographs and/or video graphic media by Departmental Personnel is authorized, provided it is accomplished under the following guidelines:
 - Field Operations Personnel (Career/Volunteer):
 - a. Pictures may only be taken after the completion of all active assignments relating to the incident.
 - b. Will be accomplished by or with the approval of an officer only.
 - c. May only be taken during an incident for the purpose to document the mechanism of injury by responding crews.

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- d. All pictures shall be limited to public venues/scenes such as: roadways and paved public streets.
 - e. Photographs, video graphic media and audio recordings from inside a private house/business are prohibited unless obtained during a fire or other legal investigations conducted by the Fire Marshal's Office.
 - f. Photographs, video graphic media and audio recordings of a patient(s) /victim(s) who are part of an incident will not be released without the approval of the Fire Chief.
 - g. The use of the video feature or photographic on all personal cell phones, cameras and/or the use of helmet video cams at an incident scene are strictly prohibited.
3. Public Information Officer/Assistant Public Information Officer(s)/Fire Marshal(s):
 - a. Photography, video graphic and audio recordings may be accomplished by: civilian, firefighter, and an officer assigned to these positions.
 - b. Photography, video graphic and audio recordings may be accomplished in any venue; including private homes, businesses and in the patient compartment of an ambulance after obtaining the required consent/permission.
 - c. Any and all equipment at the disposal of these personnel may be utilized to document/obtain the necessary information and/or media.
- B. Any photographic/video graphic/audio recordings information or media that is obtained by a civilian, career or volunteer member of the department while functioning as an agent of the Annapolis Fire Department shall become the copyrighted property of the Department and shall not be released, distributed, posted and/or published in any form (e.g.- facebook, twitter, media outlets, family/friends, station/personal web pages, etc.) without the prior approval of the Fire Chief via the Public Information Officer.
1. Exception to this practice is provided to Fire Investigators which are permitted to release photos and videos as required as part of an investigation.
- C. Approval from the Fire Chief may be obtained via the following steps:
1. All images shall be forwarded to the Department's PIO immediately after the incident in which there was a collection of photographic/video graphic media and/or audio recordings (This can be done electronically or via inter-departmental mail).
 2. All requests should contain the specific venue for which you are requesting the photo's release (e.g.-station website, personal website, training program, etc.).
 3. Once the photographic/video graphic media and/or audio recordings have been submitted for approval:
 - a. The images, video, and audio shall be deleted from the appropriate electronic equipment from which it was created.
 - b. Digital memory cards/DVD's/videotapes shall also have all images, video, and audio deleted from the device. If the type of media will not allow the images/video/audio to be removed, the media shall be forwarded to the Department's Public Information Officer.
 4. Once received, the Department's Public Information Officer will review the media and make a recommendation to the Fire Chief regarding approval/disapproval.
 - a. The Fire Chief will approve/disapprove all information/media requests.
 - b. Upon the Fire Chief's approval/disapproval, the Public Information Officer will inform the individual member in writing (email) of the Fire Chief's decision and any restrictions therewith.
 5. All approved information will be for official fire department use only and any information that is collected shall only be disseminated/published to an approved venue.

2.10.6
Social Media Policy

The use of social media and electronic transmissions has become challenging for public safety agencies and their personnel throughout the country. The proper use of social media can be beneficial to the department, personnel and the public. However, improper use can potentially undermine the confidence of the public in the integrity of the department and its personnel. There is no presumption of privacy when information is posted on social media websites and/or transmitted electronically.

This policy applies to the use of social media sites and the use of social media in general by all personnel, with the understanding that new communication modalities and technology will continue to evolve.

All personnel shall adhere to the guidelines listed below on the use of social media and electronic transmissions whether on or off duty.

2.10.6.1

Definitions

- A. Social Media: A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to: social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs, and news sites (Digg, Reddit).
- B. Social Networks: Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies and functionalities.
- C. Speech: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape or related forms of communication.
- D. Blog: A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions or comments. The term is short for "Web log."
- E. Page: The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed, and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights.
- F. Post: Content a person shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.
- G. Profile: Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social media site.
- H. Discussion/Message Boards: An online discussion site where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages. These forums can be posted to anonymously or with a login ID. A single conversation is called a 'thread'.
- I. Employees, Personnel and/or Members: These terms as used in this policy include all career, volunteer and civilian personnel of the Annapolis Fire Department.

2.10.6.2

General:

- A. The primary obligation of the Annapolis Fire Department (AFD) is to provide emergency services for the protection of the public health, safety and welfare. To do so effectively requires public trust in both individual members of the department and the department as a whole. Conduct that brings the department into disrepute risks undermining the public confidence and may impede the ability of the department to fulfill its mission.
- B. Department personnel have the right to use social networking sites, modalities and technologies. However, due to the nature of services provided by the department and the importance of the public trust in carrying out its mission, public safety personnel are held to a high standard of professionalism. This includes both on-duty and off-duty conduct that may impact the integrity of the department, its personnel and the efficient operation of the department. As such, we are all obligated to maintain a high level of professionalism and decorum and to refrain from conduct that is contrary to the mission of the department, even while off-duty.

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1. Personnel should be aware that courts have upheld employment decisions, including termination of employment, for personal conduct using on-line and social media sites where the conduct undermines the operations or brings disrepute on the employer. Thus, personnel should exercise caution in identifying themselves as members of the department or in posting about matters involving the department or matters within the scope of employment.
 2. The United States Supreme Court has recognized that public employees have limited free speech rights. Public employees have First Amendment protection when they speak as private citizens about matters of public concern. *Garcetti v. Ceballos*, [547 U.S. 410 (2006)]. Outside this protected area, a government employer may take appropriate disciplinary action for speech that undermines the operations of the agency or brings disrepute on the employer, even when the speech in question occurs when the employee is off-duty.
 3. The department has a duty to protect the reputation of the agency, its personnel and to minimize potential risk and legal liability. Accordingly, the department reserves the right to monitor and/or access without prior notice social media sites using information that is publicly available through the internet.
 4. All personnel should be aware that content of social networking sites and other postings may be accessed and used in criminal or civil trials in which the department may testify to impeach credibility, to demonstrate bias, neglect of duty, or issues that might undermine an individual's integrity as a witness. Information that is not publicly available may be accessed by a court subpoena if necessary.

2.10.6.3

Guidelines for Personal Use

- A. All personnel are prohibited from accessing personal social media sites while on duty if such access interferes with performance of assigned duties.
- B. The use of personal recording devices such as cameras, video recorders, helmet cameras, audio recorders, cell phones or any device with audio and video recorder applications are prohibited while at any incident scene without prior approval of the Chief of the Department or their designee.
 1. Personnel assigned to the Public Information Office, Office of the Fire Marshal, Training Division, Operational Field Battalion Chiefs, EMS Duty Officers or Safety Officers may authorize the use of such devices solely to capture the content to be used by AFD, and under no circumstances will photo images, video, or audio of any incident scene, patients or bystanders be posted on any personal social media site.
 2. Personnel who are not members of the Public Information Office are prohibited from posting on any social media site or electronically transmitting any information outside the Department regarding the transport, treatment, or condition of any patient. This includes personnel of AFD who may have been provided care and or transportation to a medical facility.
- C. Personnel are prohibited from publishing, transmitting, or otherwise disseminating any information, documents or images to which they have access as a result of their employment with the Department without approval of the Chief of the Department or their designee. This includes any confidential, privileged, or incident-related information or images, as well as information or images in the public domain that, if posted by a member of the Department, would bring disrepute on the Department or interfere with the Department's public safety duties and mission.
- D. Personnel are prohibited from posting or publishing any statements, endorsements, or other speech, information, images or personnel matters that could reasonably be interpreted to represent or undermine the views or positions of the Department, the City of Annapolis, or officials acting on behalf of the Department or the City, unless a member has obtained express permission to post or publish such material from the Chief of the Department or their designee.
- E. Personnel are prohibited from posting on any social media site or electronically transmitting any information regarding an AFD incident, ongoing investigation, or pending litigation (both criminal and civil actions).
- F. Personnel shall refrain from posting or publishing statements, opinions or information that might reasonably be interpreted as discriminatory, harassing, defamatory, racially or ethnically derogatory, or sexually violent when such statements, opinions or information, may place the Department in disrepute or negatively impact the ability of the Department in carrying out of its mission.

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- G. Personnel shall not post any information or images involving off-duty activities that may impugn the reputation of the Department or any member of the Department.
 - H. Personnel are prohibited from posting on any social media site or electronically transmitting messages, images, comments or cartoons displaying threatening or sexually-explicit material, epithets or slurs based on race, ethnic or national origin, gender, religious affiliation, disability, sexual orientation, or harassing, offensive, discriminatory, or defamatory comments.

2.10.6.4

Department's Public Social Media Presence

- A. Social media provides a valuable means of assisting the Department in providing time-sensitive notification related to fire incidents, special events, disasters and weather emergencies. Social media will also aide in community outreach and education efforts, assisting in the communication of fire prevention tips, medical EMS-related tips, recognition, success stories and statistics.
- B. The Department's social media presence will be administered by the AFD Public Information Office.
- C. Personnel are encouraged to submit photos, videos, articles and other materials internally for posting on the Department's public social media sites. These items can be submitted to the Public Information Office.
- D. Affiliate organizations and member groups are encouraged to work with the AFD Public Information Office to review social media best practices and to ensure that their respective social media sites are in accordance with both City and Department statutes.

2.10.6.5

Email and Internet Usage

- A. The use of any emails that are all-Department (ie; All-AFDnet, All-Sworn-Fire, All-departmentdirectors, etc.) shall not be used without the approval of either the Fire Chief or Deputy Chief or their designee. Information being sent on these emails is assumed to have the approval of the Chiefs, so it should be verified by them first.
 - 1. The Department is willing to use email to share any personal information with the rest of the department personnel such as births, marriages, illnesses, etc. However, these shall come from the Fire Administrative Specialist or their designee and only after approval of the family.
- B. Internet services that are used during working and non-working hours are for authorized purposes only. This may include but not be limited to, using the Internet to train personnel on the use of the Internet, etc.
- C. Personnel may use the Internet as a way to exchange information with the public and internally as a technology information tool.
- D. Personnel shall take adequate precautions when processing or storing data on computers connected to the Internet and when transferring data on or through the Internet. Information security requirements shall always be a primary consideration when utilizing the Internet.
- E. The Internet may not be used for:
 - 1. The pursuit of private, commercial business activities or profit-making ventures.
 - 2. Matters directed towards any political candidate, special interest group, event or any political or social position.
 - 3. Direct or indirect lobbying.
 - 4. Use of Internet sites that result in additional charges to the Department.
 - 5. Engaging in prohibited discriminatory conduct.

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6. Obtaining or viewing sexually explicit material unless directly pursuant to an actual law enforcement purpose/investigation and then only with the prior permission of the personnel's immediate supervisor.
 7. Any activity that would bring discredit on the Department.
 8. Any violation of statute or regulation.

2.10.7

Fire Department CAD Information

All dispatch information contained in the Anne Arundel County CAD system is intended for official Fire Department use only. Personnel shall not use any information in CAD for personal or professional use or gain. In addition, information such as caller information (ID) and history shall not be released to anyone (including our personnel) to assist in identifying a 911 caller that wishes to remain anonymous.